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**Oleanna, press**

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# Theatre opens with 'Oleanna'



Sam Freeman | The Reflector

Matthew Webb and Madeline Siggins play John and Carol in "Oleanna," a play about the dynamics between professors and students.

## Matthew Allen

### The Reflector

This weekend, the McComas Hall lab theatre will be the site of big drama.

The department of communication is producing David Mamet's "Oleanna," starring Matthew Webb as John and Madeline Siggins as Carol. The play is directed by Christopher Tyer and Amber Crausby.

After directing two one-act plays, "Oleanna" marks Tyer's first venture into feature-length productions as a director. Mamet's work is considered by many to be top-notch to the point of intimidation, but to Tyer, the script came as a welcome challenge.

"It is just an incredible script from beginning to end," Tyer said. "It is structurally sound, as are pretty much all of Mamet's plays. Every night, I find some new little nuances to pick up on."

Written in 1992, "Oleanna" gets dramatic when Carol, a struggling Ivy League freshman, has a conference with her professor, John. She hysterically confuses the tension between them as sexual harassment. She notifies the administration of her accusations, and the school's board is quick to comply, leaving John to fight for his job and his dignity. Despite the well-defined storyline, the script is wide open for different interpretations.

"There's a lot of hidden meaning," Crausby said. "There are so many different ways you can read it and so many ways to develop and interpret the characters."

After cutting his teeth as an actor in several shows at Mississippi State University, the shift to directing has come with a few adjustments for Tyer.

"It's totally different," Tyer said. "In acting, you focus on your character and how he relates to other characters. As a director, you have to think about how this character should interact with that character. You have to consider the set design and the props as well as the little details like how someone is sitting or standing."

"Oleanna" was not Tyer's first choice, but there was never any question regarding the playwright.

"My first choice was 'American Buffalo,' also

by Mamet, but the language and violence within it are a little too much for this space," Tyer said. "His (Mamet's) command of language is almost poetic. He has the ability to take everyday language, everyday situations and make them into something extraordinary."

The challenge of interpreting the script was not a burden Tyer carried alone. The language may be beautiful, but Siggins often found herself a little tongue-tied.

"There are all these little interjections here and there that you don't really use in normal language," Siggins said. "The script was difficult to memorize because the conversations take a lot of sharp turns."

With its Ivy League setting and prevalent issues, "Oleanna" is ideal for a college audience.

"It looks at political correctness, it makes us look at the little things we do and how it affects us in the long run," Tyer said. "It shows how we've become so uptight that a little brush on the shoulder, a little friendly gesture, a friendly remark can get completely blown out of context."

"It is mature, but I think it is the right concept for a college audience," Webb said.

The intimate nature of the script also makes it a fitting choice for the lab theatre.

"The show has a lot of depth to it, yet it's on a smaller scale, so it reaches out on a personal level and makes the controversial issues all the more relevant," Crausby said.

Even if the audience does not grasp Mamet's eloquent language, there is at least one way they can relate to the show.

"The students can relate to it because even if they can't understand what John says, they've all had professors they couldn't connect with," Siggins said.

On a technical note, the scene was designed by Tim Watson and Wayne Durst, while the costume and make-up designs are by Tricia Morgan. Webb also doubled as the lighting designer.

"Oleanna" will be performed at the McComas Hall lab theatre Feb. 21-23 at 7:30 p.m., and Feb. 24 at 2 p.m. Tickets are \$10 for the general public and \$5 for students, faculty, children and senior citizens. They can be purchased at the McComas Hall box office. With limited seating, advance purchasing of tickets is recommended.

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—Amber Crausby, co-director